United Nations S/2011/241

Security Council

Distr.: General
13 April 2011

Original: English

Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in the Central African Republic

Summary

The present report has been prepared pursuant to Security Council resolution 1612 (2005) and is submitted to the Security Council and its Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict as the second country report on children and armed conflict in the Central African Republic, covering the period from December 2008 to December 2010. The report follows my first report on this issue (S/2009/66) and the subsequent conclusions and recommendations of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict (S/AC.51/2009/2).

The report highlights the ongoing protection crisis in the country, caused by sporadic fighting between Government forces and armed groups, prevalent banditry and the extreme poverty of the population. The crisis is compounded by the lack of capacity of the defence and security forces and the judiciary, as well as by insufficient socio-economic opportunities.

In spite of the Government's commitment to end the use and recruitment of children, their mobilization into the ranks of rebel groups and self-defence militias throughout the country continued during the reporting period. Children have been mobilized by the Armée populaire pour la restauration de la République et la démocratie, the Union des forces démocratiques pour le rassemblement, the Front démocratique du peuple centrafricain and the Mouvement des libérateurs centrafricains pour la justice, which are signatories to the 2008 Libreville Comprehensive Peace Agreement. Children were also present in the ranks of the Convention des patriotes pour la justice et la paix. Limited progress was made in the development and implementation of action plans by armed groups signatories to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement.

The report notes other grave violations, such as the killing of children, sexual violence, attacks on health centres and the denial of humanitarian access. In the south-east of the country, the Lord's Resistance Army continues to abduct and forcibly recruit children and use them as combatants, spies, sex slaves and porters.

The report identifies the national armed forces, armed groups, self-defence militias and road bandits as responsible for grave violations against children. It also describes the programmatic response to violations committed.

11-29769 (E) 150411

Please recycle

Finally, the report stresses the considerable challenges in monitoring and reporting, as well as addressing, grave violations against children, and outlines a series of recommendations with a view to securing strengthened action for the protection of children in the Central African Republic.

I. Introduction

1. The present report has been prepared in accordance with the provisions of Security Council resolutions 1612 (2005) and 1882 (2009). It covers the period from December 2008 to December 2010, and is my second report on the situation of children in the Central African Republic. The report focuses on grave violations perpetrated against children, and progress made to end such violations, in follow-up to the recommendations contained in my previous report (S/2009/66), as well as to the conclusions of the Council's Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict (S/AC.51/2009/2).

2. During the reporting period, the monitoring of and reporting on grave violations committed against children continued to be challenging, owing mainly to security, logistics and capacity constraints. Hence, the information contained in the present report could not always be verified by the United Nations technical group on monitoring and reporting, and information not verified has been noted as such. Furthermore, owing to the limited number of cases reported by victims, the data collected during the reporting period on grave violations reflected only in part the magnitude of the grave violations committed against children in conflict-affected areas.

II. Overview of the political and security situation

3. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the Government of the Central African Republic, the Armée populaire pour la restauration de la République et la démocratie (APRD) and the Union des forces démocratiques pour le rassemblement (UFDR), signed in Libreville on 21 June 2008, called for, inter alia, the promulgation by the Government of a general amnesty law and the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants from APRD and UFDR. The Agreement was later signed by the Mouvement des libérateurs centrafricains pour la justice (MLCJ) (on 7 December 2008) and the Union des forces républicaines (UFR) (on 15 December 2008). The Comprehensive Peace Agreement led, in December 2008, to the Inclusive Political Dialogue among the Government of the Central African Republic, parties representing the political and armed opposition, including signatories to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, and civil society representatives. Agreement was reached on the organization of presidential and legislative elections, security sector reform and the implementation of a disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme. On 3 July 2009, the Front démocratique du peuple centrafricain (FDPC) adhered to the peace process in the Central African Republic.

4. Since the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, no major attacks have been reported in the north-western prefectures of Ouham, Ouham-Pendé and Nana-Gribizi during the reporting period. UFDR, which controls areas of the Vakaga and Haute-Kotto prefectures in the north-east of the country, carried out operations, frequently in coordination with the national defence forces (Forces armées centrafricaines), against the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). There were sporadic skirmishes between the Convention des patriotes pour la justice et la paix (CPJP) and the Forces armées centrafricaines throughout the reporting period, including in Ndélé (Bamingui-Bangoran prefecture) in November 2009 and April 2010 and Birao (Vakaga prefecture) in July and November 2010. CPJP is not a

signatory to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, and efforts to engage in peace negotiations with the group have not borne fruit. In addition, there were recurrent outbreaks of fighting between FDPC and the Forces armées centrafricaines to control the Kabo-Sido axis in the north-central region in 2010.

5. The first round of the presidential and legislative elections, initially scheduled for 25 April 2010 and postponed twice owing to technical difficulties, were held on 23 January 2011. On 12 February 2011, the Constitutional Court declared the President, François Bozizé, the winner of the presidential elections in the first round. The second round of the legislative elections, boycotted by the opposition, was held on 27 March 2011 to allocate 69 of 105 seats in the National Assembly.

6. With regard to foreign armed elements present in the Central African Republic, attacks by LRA continued throughout the reporting period in the east and south-east (Haut-Mbomou, Mbomou and Haute-Kotto prefectures), as well as in the north-east (Vakaga prefecture). In 2009 and 2010, the Ugandan People's Defence Forces (UPDF) began conducting military operations in the eastern and south-eastern prefectures (Haute-Kotto, Mbomou and Haut-Mbomou) with a view to dismantling LRA, with the consent of the Government of the Central African Republic.

7. In addition to domestic and foreign armed groups, road bandits, known as "Zaraguinas" or *coupeurs de route*, continued to operate in the northern areas of the country. Their activities included attacks, hijackings and extortion of property and funds. There were several reports of civilians being tortured and executed by Zaraguinas and of population displacements, with people abandoning their villages, houses and fields following attacks by these road bandits.

8. The United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad (MINURCAT), which was deployed in the north-eastern town of Birao (Vakaga prefecture) from March 2008 to November 2010, had a positive but limited impact in the area of its deployment. Following the Security Council's decision to terminate the mandate of MINURCAT, the Mission's contingent withdrew from Birao on 15 November. CPJP attacked the town on 24 November, targeting the Forces armées centrafricaines base and prompting Chadian armed forces to enter the territory of the Central African Republic and to attack CPJP positions in Birao, on the basis of an agreement with the Central African Government. The Chadian army was present in Birao for several weeks after the CPJP attack.

9. On 1 January 2010, the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in the Central African Republic (BINUCA) was established, with a mandate to, inter alia, ensure that child protection is properly addressed in the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process, including by supporting the monitoring and reporting mechanism established according to resolutions 1539 (2004) and 1612 (2005) (see S/PRST/2009/5).

10. The Mission for the Consolidation of Peace in the Central African Republic (MICOPAX), which was mandated by the Economic Community of Central African States, succeeded the Multinational Force of the Central African Economic and Monetary Community in July 2008. It has been deployed in Bangui and the north of the country, including in Ouham-Pendé (Paoua and Bozoum) and Nana-Gribizi (Kaga-Bandoro) prefectures, with a mandate to consolidate peace and security, support security sector reform and the organization of elections, coordinate

humanitarian assistance and help ensure that human rights, in particular the rights of women and children, are respected. MICOPAX was deployed in Ndélé (Bamingui-Bangoran prefecture) early in 2011.

11. In the north-west and in the LRA-affected areas of the east and south-east, local community self-defence militias are providing security against armed criminal gangs and other armed elements. Those self-defence groups are supported by the authorities in the absence of a sufficient presence of national defence and security forces in the country.

III. Grave violations against children: trends and incidents

12. Insecurity continues to hamper progress towards respect for children's rights. Serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law were perpetrated by all parties to the conflict, including the national armed forces, rebel groups and self-defence groups. Sporadic fighting between Government forces and armed groups and widespread banditry, as well as the extreme poverty of the population, have led to a protection crisis, which has affected women and children in particular. Civilians have suffered as a result of physical and sexual violence and the loss of their property and livelihoods. During the reporting period, many civilians in conflict-affected areas fled their villages and homes following or in anticipation of attacks by armed groups.

13. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that, at the end of 2010, there were approximately 192,000 internally displaced persons and nearly 24,700 refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Sudan and Chad in the Central African Republic, in addition to the estimated 162,000 Central African refugees in neighbouring countries. Of the 192,000 internally displaced, more than 25,000 were civilians displaced since February 2010 as a result of attacks or fear of attack by LRA in the eastern prefectures of Mbomou and Haut-Mbomou. Among the 25,000, some 6,000 displaced civilians were reported in the town of Rafai and 7,000 in the town of Zémio (Haut-Mbomou prefecture, in the south-east) following LRA attacks in April 2010. Throughout the country, displacements have greatly affected residents of towns where displaced populations have regrouped.

14. While efforts made by the Government of the Central African Republic to meet international human rights standards should be acknowledged, limited progress was made in the area of child protection, owing not only to the persistence of armed conflict, but also to societal factors regarding gender-based violence, gender discrimination, abuse and exploitation of children. The lack of systematic birth registration exacerbated challenges related to addressing grave violations, since it is often not possible to prove the age of an individual. According to official statistics, only 49 per cent of births were registered nationally in 2010.

A. Recruitment and use of children

15. Child recruitment by armed groups continued to be a serious concern throughout the reporting period, in particular in the north-east and east of the country.

16. While the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of 525 children associated with APRD between June 2008 and December 2010 was a significant step forward, the United Nations received reports of children, both boys and girls, remaining with that armed group. APRD commanders denied having purposefully recruited children, explaining that children had joined voluntarily for food and protection.

17. In the north of the country, UFDR, CPJP and local self-defence militias reportedly continued to use children. Children were seen fighting in the ranks of UFDR and CPJP during the attack on Birao (Vakaga) by CPJP on 24 November 2010. The presence of children among self-defence militias remained of concern to the United Nations, in particular in the north-west and LRA-affected areas. The United Nations has continued its advocacy efforts with the authorities of the Central African Republic regarding the need to halt the use and recruitment of children by all armed actors, including self-defence groups.

18. It was also reported that FDPC, which has refused to join the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process, had continued to use children near Kabo (Ouham prefecture). Witnesses indicated that children had been seen among the ranks of MLJC in Vakaga prefecture.

19. According to reports received by the United Nations, LRA has engaged throughout the reporting period in the abduction and forced recruitment of children into its ranks, where they have allegedly been used as combatants, spies, servants, sex slaves and carriers. In 2010, there were reports, including by children who had escaped from LRA, of cross-border recruitment of children abducted in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Sudan and moved by LRA into the Central African Republic. Several of those reports are referred to below (see paras. 29 and 30).

B. Killing and maiming of children

20. The killing of children continued to be reported to the United Nations throughout the reporting period. In the north-west, 18 people from the Peuhl ethnic group, including 4 children, were reportedly killed by APRD in Taley, near Markounda (Ouham-Pendé prefecture) in February 2010. In the north, a 16-year-old girl was killed during an attack by CPJP elements on Kpata, near Ndélé (Bamingui-Bangoran prefecture), on 26 October 2010.

21. In the south-east, in particular in Mbomou and Haut-Mbomou prefectures as well as parts of Haute-Kotto prefecture, there were multiple indiscriminate attacks by LRA. Such attacks targeted both adults and children. At least three children, ranging in age from 12 to 15, were killed in Haut-Mbomou prefecture by LRA elements on 3 November 2009, including a young girl who was beaten to death. In Nguiriguiri (Haut-Mbomou prefecture), a 14-year-old boy was seriously injured by LRA on 5 November 2009. In another attack, on 21 February 2010 in Agoumar (Haut-Mbomou prefecture), 14 villagers, including children, were killed by LRA, reportedly in retaliation for the injury of an LRA element several days before.

22. Maiming incidents were reported in my previous report; however, reports of maiming were not received during the current reporting period. It should be noted that this does not mean that no cases of maiming occurred during the reporting

period; data collection and verification challenges could explain the absence of reports on maiming incidents.

C. Rape and other grave sexual violence

23. Rape and other sexual violence against children remained of grave concern during the reporting period, even though incidents continued to be severely underreported, as victims are reluctant to seek assistance or report violations for a number of reasons, including cultural factors, public stigmatization, fear of reprisal and lack of trust in the judiciary. Hence, when cases of sexual violence occur, including against children, victims often do not file a complaint with the judicial authorities. Instead, traditional authorities often try to negotiate settlements between the family of the victim and the aggressor, using local justice systems. When victims do file a complaint, it is often several days or weeks after the incident has occurred and in the presence of their parents. Weak law enforcement has contributed to impunity, and is compounded by the absence of protective measures to separate victims of sexual violence from their known aggressors in the community.

24. In 2010, a study sponsored by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) estimated that 25 per cent of reported cases of rape and other grave sexual violence against children were perpetrated by armed elements, including Zaraguinas. In the east and south-east, abductions of young girls for use as sex slaves were reported by several victims who were able to escape LRA. To the north of Ndélé (Bamingui-Bangoran prefecture) between March and June 2010, acts of sexual violence were allegedly perpetrated by CPJP elements against the communities of several villages, including Gozbeida and Zoukoutouniala. The victims included children.

D. Attacks on schools and hospitals

25. The education system has been affected considerably by the climate of insecurity, especially in the east of the country. The dropout rate throughout the country remained high during the reporting period, and was estimated at 53 per cent in 2010. While schools were not specifically targeted by armed groups operating in the east, fear of incursions by armed groups, including LRA, prevented parents from sending their children to school. It was also reported that schools in several villages in Mbomou (Rafai and Dembia in particular) and Haut-Mbomou prefectures (Zemio and villages near Obo) were closed from mid-May to September 2010 owing to LRA activity.

26. BINUCA was informed that several schools, located in villages near Bria (Haute-Kotto prefecture), were occupied by CPJP elements between May and July 2010. In addition, following the occupation by CPJP of the town of Ippy (Ouaka prefecture) in October 2010, schools were closed and a significant part of the population fled the town.

27. Owing to insecurity, most communities in conflict-affected areas lacked qualified teachers. Incidents of teachers fleeing villages owing to lack of security, as well as abductions and killings of teachers, have been reported, although it is not clear whether teachers were targeted because of their profession. Several communities have responded to the lack of teachers by employing parents, referred to as "*maître-parents*", who usually do not have a secondary school diploma.

28. Several health centres were looted during attacks on villages in the east and north of the country, in particular in Mbomou, Haut-Mbomou, Haute-Kotto, Vakaga and Bamingui-Bangoran prefectures. To the north of Ndélé (Bamingui-Bangoran prefecture), looting of health centres by CPJP was reported in April 2010 in Akrousoulbak and Zoukoutouniala villages. The villages were later burned in retaliation, reportedly by national defence and security forces. In Mbomou and Haut-Mbomou prefectures, repeated attacks by LRA included the destruction of villages and the looting of several health centres. In Vakaga prefecture, an LRA attack on the town of Birao on 10 October 2010 included the looting of health centres. In the same prefecture, LRA attacked the town of Ouanda-Djalé on 5 September 2010. Houses were burned and the medical centre, which was supported by International Medical Corps, was looted.

E. Abductions

29. Abductions of children by LRA in the Central African Republic, especially in the south-east of the country, remain of concern. In May 2009, following an attack on Yangou-Pendéré (Haute-Kotto prefecture), 36 civilians, including 11 children and 3 babies, were abducted. In August 2009, 45 civilians, including 11 children, were abducted during attacks on Nzako and Bani (Haute-Kotto prefecture), but were freed a month later by UFDR near the town of Bria. In October 2009, LRA twice attacked Baroua, in Mbomou prefecture, abducting 29 people, including 7 children. In December 2009, 2 women, 2 men and a 10-year-old girl were abducted by LRA when they attacked the village of Kadjemah, 45 km from Obo, in Haut-Mbomou prefecture. On 10 October 2010, 9 children (8 girls and 1 boy) were abducted by LRA elements during the attack on Birao town. They were released two weeks later by MLJC and UFDR.

30. Girls who were former abductees of LRA reported on cross-border abductions. A young Sudanese girl, who escaped in September 2010, testified that she had been abducted by LRA in Southern Sudan in 2007 and was later brought to the Central African Republic by LRA. She was pregnant when she escaped, and she gave birth at a United Nations-supported transit centre in Bangui. She was reunited with her family in Southern Sudan in October 2010. Another teenage girl, who escaped LRA in December 2010, told the United Nations that she had been abducted in October 2010, in the village of Nguelema, near Dungu, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and had then been taken to the Central African Republic. At the time of reporting, she was still at a UNICEF-supported transit centre in Bangui while efforts were being made by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to trace her family in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In 2009 and 2010, the United Nations registered 26 children (7 boys and 19 girls) of Congolese, Ugandan, Sudanese and Central African nationality who had escaped from LRA and were repatriated and reunited with their families.

F. Denial of humanitarian access

31. During the reporting period, humanitarian access was difficult and limited in certain areas of the north, north-east and south-east owing to armed group and LRA activity. On several occasions, negotiations on humanitarian access were complicated by lack of clarity in the parties' chain of command, in particular that of

FDPC in Kabo (Ouham prefecture). In a few cases, humanitarian access was denied by armed groups, which hampered the ability of international agencies to document and report on grave violations committed against children. At the end of 2010, humanitarian activities were reduced in all three prefectures (Bamingui-Bangoran, Nana-Gribizi and Ouham prefectures), owing to lack of security, limited access to vulnerable populations and difficulty in negotiating with the armed groups.

32. In the north, several attacks against international organizations were carried out in 2010, involving UFDR, FDPC and APRD. In September, a mobile clinic belonging to an international non-governmental organization near Ndélé (Bamingui-Bangoran prefecture) was looted by an unidentified armed group in the UFDR-controlled area. During the same month, a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) convoy was attacked by rebels from FDPC on the Ouandago-Kabo road (Nana-Gribizi/Ouham prefectures). On 20 October, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization convoys were blocked by APRD elements in Gouzé (Ouham-Pendé prefecture), who demanded payment for passing a checkpoint. When the convoys tried to turn back, the road was blocked by rebels until payment was made. On 21 October, APRD rebels blocked a MICOPAX convoy in Paoua (Ouham prefecture).

33. An attack on Ndélé town (Bamingui-Bangoran prefecture) on 25 November 2009 by CPJP elements who used two stolen vehicles belonging to an international non-governmental organization led the Government to prohibit access by international non-governmental organizations on major routes around Ndélé. The Government argued that humanitarian organizations were fuelling the conflict by supporting armed groups. Following intensive negotiations conducted by the United Nations, the authorities authorized humanitarian organizations to access Ndélé in July 2010.

34. In the north-east, a series of incidents of armed attacks and banditry occurred during the reporting period. These resulted in the evacuation of humanitarian workers and led to the near-total interruption of humanitarian activities in the area. Late in November 2009, two humanitarian workers of the international non-governmental organization Triangle Generation Humanitaire were kidnapped from their home in the centre of Birao. The two hostages were liberated five months later in the Sudan. During the CPJP attack on Birao on 24 November 2010, a national staff member of Comité d'Aide Médicale was fatally wounded by a stray bullet. Several lootings of the Triangle Generation Humanitaire office in Birao were reported between June and November 2010, although perpetrators could not be identified. Such incidents forced humanitarian organizations to restrict their movements. By the end of 2009, only ICRC, International Medical Corps, the Comité d'Aide Médicale and the Triangle Generation Humanitaire were present in Vakaga prefecture. The withdrawal of most international non-governmental organizations from Vakaga has adversely affected the rural population, in particular children, depriving them of international assistance.

35. In the eastern prefectures of Mbomou and Haut-Mbomou, humanitarian access was limited for security and logistical reasons during the reporting period. On 21 September 2009, an attack on a convoy of the international non-governmental organization Cooperazione Internazionale near Obo (Haut-Mbomou prefecture) resulted in the deaths of two humanitarian workers and serious injury to another. Widespread insecurity in these LRA-affected prefectures required the United

Nations to use armed escorts for humanitarian convoys travelling by road. This considerably limited aid delivery to the displaced rural population.

IV. Implementation of the monitoring and reporting mechanism on grave violations against children

36. The United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office in the Central African Republic (BONUCA), which was replaced in January 2010 by BINUCA, co-led, with UNICEF, a technical-level inter-agency group on the monitoring and reporting mechanism. This technical-level group, initially formed in 2008 and reactivated in 2010 after a period of inactivity, has coordinated United Nations efforts to monitor and report on grave violations against children and organized training sessions to promote the rights of children in situations of armed conflict. Efforts are under way to activate the Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting at the highest level in 2011. There have been challenges in the full implementation of the monitoring and reporting mechanism owing to resource and personnel constraints affecting the United Nations in the Central African Republic.

V. Follow-up to the conclusions of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict

A. Government efforts to strengthen child protection

1. Reinforcing and training defence and security forces

37. The Government has made efforts to reinforce the capacity of national security forces in the north-west, north-east and south-east of the country, including LRA-affected areas, to ensure the greater protection of vulnerable populations, in particular children and internally displaced persons. Responding to security concerns, the Government deployed additional forces during the course of 2010 to conflict-affected areas. In 2010, Forces armées centrafricaines personnel were deployed in the north (Markounda, Paoua and Kaga-Bandoro), the east and north-east (Ippy, Bria, Ndélé and Birao) and the south and south-east (Mongoumba, Mobaye, Bangassou and Bakouma). However, the deployment of additional forces was limited owing to lack of capacity. Forces armées centrafricaines battalions were often redeployed from one area to another to respond to competing demands. The Government has stated its willingness to deploy more troops throughout the country, including in areas affected by LRA, subject to the provision of external logistical support.

38. The Government has also demonstrated its commitment to training its military and police personnel on issues related to child protection and gender. In April 2010, a training session on human rights and child protection for 45 gendarmerie and police officers was conducted in M'Baïki (Lobaye prefecture) by Cooperazione Internazionale and BINUCA, in coordination with the Ministry of Defence (Army and Gendarmerie) and the Police Directorate. In May 2010, approximately 45 judiciary police officers were trained by BINUCA at the Institute of Gendarmerie in Bangui on child protection, including protection against physical and sexual violence, in coordination with the Police Directorate.

39. From 13 to 20 December 2010, the Ministry of Defence and the Police Directorate selected 26 officers to attend a one-week training course, organized by UNICEF on the theme "The protection of children during, before and after conflict" and held the town of Boali (Ombella-Mpoko prefecture). The training course ended with the drafting of three proposed action plans by the military, the gendarmerie and police officers on the protection of children, to be shared with their superiors. The 26 officers were to replicate the training course for their colleagues in 2011, with the support of UNICEF.

2. National child protection mechanism

40. The Government has not yet appointed a high-level focal point on child protection to ensure the development of effective prevention methods and response activities with regard to abuses and violations committed against children, as recommended by the Security Council Working Group. However, efforts were being made to ensure that an inter-ministerial mechanism on child protection would be established in 2011.

41. On 10 and 11 December 2010, the Government organized, with the support of UNICEF, a two-day seminar to finalize a draft decree aimed at establishing a national council on child protection, to be located within the Office of the Prime Minister, with members from all ministries involved in addressing child protection issues. Participants included representatives of the Prime Minister's Office, 22 ministries (including the Ministries of Social Affairs, Justice, Health and Education), national organizations specializing in child protection issues, and civil society. The draft decree was to be adopted early in 2011. Although the national council on child protection, once created, will not focus exclusively on child victims of grave violations in situations of armed conflict, it is expected that it will play a key role in ensuring the adoption of measures to end and prevent grave violations committed against children, including their recruitment and use in self-defence militias.

42. Other governmental efforts to strengthen child protection included the establishment by the Government, on 21 June 2009, with the support of the national Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and Good Governance and UNHCR, of a national committee for the protection of internally displaced persons, and the validation, at a seminar organized in Bangui on 15 and 16 December 2010, with the support of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), of a bill to establish a national commission on human rights and fundamental freedoms in the Central African Republic.

3. Ending the use of children in armed groups and forces

43. From 7 to 9 June 2010, the Government of the Central African Republic participated in a regional conference in N'Djamena, organized by the Government of Chad, to end the recruitment and use of children by armed forces and groups. The Government of the Central African Republic, as well as other participating countries (Cameroon, Chad, Nigeria, the Niger and the Sudan), signed the N'Djamena Declaration, by which they committed to end the use of children within their armed forces and to adopt concrete and institutional measures for the release and reintegration of children in their respective countries. The Declaration further commits the signatories to adhere to international standards for the protection of

children, including the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Paris Commitments to protect children from unlawful recruitment or use by armed forces or armed groups and the Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups. In August and October 2010, two follow-up meetings on the N'Djamena Declaration were held, in N'Djamena and Bangui, to discuss the implementation of the Declaration and to identify advocacy strategies for the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the establishment of a regional monitoring and information-sharing mechanism on child rights violations.

44. The Government's commitment to protecting children was later reinforced during the African Union ministerial meeting on LRA held in Bangui on 13 and 14 October 2010. Recommendations made included the establishment of a joint operations centre with officers from the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Sudan/Government of Southern Sudan and Uganda, the conduct of joint patrols along the borders of affected countries, the inclusion of a protection-of-civilians mandate for all national forces and the implementation of sensitization campaigns and strategies for the demobilization and community-based reintegration of combatants.

45. In September 2010, the Government signed the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, on the involvement of children in armed conflict, and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. However, the Optional Protocols have yet to be ratified.

4. National legislation

46. On 6 January 2010, the revised Penal Code, under discussion since 2003, was promulgated by presidential decree. BONUCA, OHCHR and UNICEF had actively supported the Ministry of Justice in its efforts to revise the Penal Code, including a section on crimes against children (chapter VII, section 1). Moreover, as a follow-up to the signing of the Pact on Security, Stability and Development in the Great Lakes Region of December 2006, the Government decided to revise its existing law on the protection of women against violence in the Central African Republic (law No. 06.032) to include the protection of children and address the issue of sexual violence in greater detail. A national seminar on the validation of a bill on the protection of women and children against violence in the Central African Republic and a strategy to establish a national centre to assist women and children victims of sexual violence was held in Bangui on 5 and 6 October 2010, with the support of BINUCA and OHCHR. The bill on the protection of women and children against violence, which directly addresses issues such as forced marriage, sexual violence, abuse, female genital mutilation and pornography, as well as the strategy for the creation of the national centre, was still under review at the time of writing.

B. Dialogue with parties to the conflict and action plans

47. During the visit of my Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict to the Central African Republic in May 2008, the leadership of APRD and UFDR committed to preparing action plans to prevent the use and recruitment of children and other grave violations.

48. A draft action plan, prepared within the framework of consultations between APRD and the United Nations, to halt child recruitment and ensure the release of all children associated with the group, has been ready for signature since June 2008. However, the Ministry of Defence, through the National Steering Committee, a mechanism established on 20 June 2008 to manage the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of children associated with armed groups and forces, has delayed its signature, arguing that, instead, a "comprehensive action plan" should be signed with all parties to the Libreville Comprehensive Peace Agreement. Despite the fact that such a comprehensive action plan was not developed during the reporting period, the child disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme for APRD has gone ahead, based on the commitment of APRD to separate all children from its ranks.

49. Disagreements between UFDR and the Government on the implementation of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process for adults have impeded the completion of an action plan to halt the recruitment of children.

50. In September 2010, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs began humanitarian negotiations with CPJP rebels and discussed the recruitment and use of children. Arguing that there were no children in its ranks, CPJP informed the Office that it would welcome a verification mission by an independent organization.

51. The presence of children among local self-defence groups, which are being supported by the local authorities to provide protection to civilians in the absence of national defence and security forces, remained a serious concern, in particular in the north-west and LRA-affected areas. The United Nations has continued its advocacy efforts with the Central African authorities on the need to halt the use and recruitment of children by all armed actors, including self-defence groups.

VI. Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and programmatic response

52. UNICEF has been coordinating the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process for children, which is conducted separately from the process for adults. In its presidential statement of 7 April 2009 (S/PRST/2009/5), the Security Council mandated BINUCA to ensure that child protection was properly addressed in the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process. During the reporting period, BINUCA has been working closely with UNICEF to support the child disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process, as well as to ensure that the process for adults takes into account child protection issues.

53. In 2009 and 2010, UNICEF and its implementing partners demobilized a total of 525 children from the ranks of APRD, 417 children in Paoua (Ouham-Pendé prefecture) in 2009 and 2010 and 108 in Kanga-Bandoro (Nana-Gribizi prefecture) in 2010. At the end of the reporting period, all 525 demobilized children, including 37 girls, were released and reunited with their families and communities and received reintegration support. It should be noted that, at the end of 2008, 775 children had been demobilized from APRD, bringing the total number of children demobilized to date to 1,300.

54. Throughout the reporting period, UNICEF has prioritized prevention, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes at the field level through its implementing partners. The International Rescue Committee, the International Medical Corps, the Comité d'aide médicale and the Danish Refugee Council have been contributing to those programmes by providing psychosocial support and counselling, especially to survivors of gender-based violence; formal and informal education; access to basic services; and sensitization on children and women's rights at the community level. These activities were funded through the Peacebuilding Fund, which allocated $1,930,000 for the first phase of the project, led by UNICEF, until May 2010. The project was implemented by International Rescue Committee, the International Medical Corps, the Danish Refugee Council, the Comité d'aide médicale, Caritas and two national partners, Jeunesse pionière nationale and the Association des femmes juristes, in seven prefectures (Ouham, Ouham-Pendé, Nana-Gribizi, Bamingui-Bangoran, Vakaga, Haute-Kotto and Haut-Mbomou). The second phase of the project, which was also funded by the Peacebuilding Fund with $1,500,000 allocated for the period from September 2010 to February 2012, has been co-led by UNICEF, the United Nations Population Fund and the World Food Programme. This project focuses on community-based reintegration of children affected by armed conflict and justice for children in contact with the law, and capacity-building of the Government to ensure effective reintegration for children affected by armed conflict. The Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Defence have been identified as institutional partners for the implementation of the project.

55. During the reporting period, the main challenge regarding the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of children formerly associated with armed groups and forces was the limited access to areas where armed groups using children were located, which was due mainly to insecurity but also to the absence of road infrastructure, especially during the rainy season. Another difficulty was the absence of experienced child protection implementing partners in remote and isolated areas to support the separation of children from armed groups. Additional challenges in the child disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process included the fact that children associated with armed groups and forces were reintegrated into communities that had limited access to basic services and livelihood opportunities, which led some children to rejoin the ranks of the armed groups in order to seek benefits through the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process for adults, as reported in the north of the country. Others have reportedly engaged in labour to support themselves, including working in mines.

56. In order to promote the sustainable reintegration of children associated with armed groups and forces, United Nations agencies have adopted an integrated approach to community care and access to basic services, reaching out to other vulnerable children, such as orphans, internally displaced children and survivors of gender-based violence. In 2009 and 2010, some 5,193 (3,386 boys, 1,807 girls) war-affected vulnerable children, including children formerly associated with APRD and UFDR, participated in vulnerability-reduction activities implemented by UNICEF partners, including the International Rescue Committee and the Danish Refugee Council, which included non-formal education and income-generating and recreational activities. UNICEF partners provided follow-up support through home visits and individual counselling. In 2010, a total of 95,797 vulnerable children (62 per cent boys and 38 per cent girls), including children associated with the

armed forces and armed groups, orphans and other vulnerable children, benefited from formal and informal education, vocational training, income-generating packages, psychosocial support, counselling and access to health services.

57. With regard to family tracing and the reunion of children affected by armed conflict with their families, UNICEF supported, in 2009, the construction of three transit centres in Boya-Betoko, Paoua and Bocaranga and, in 2010, the construction of one transit centre in Gadoulou (all in Ouham-Pendé prefecture). In Bangui, UNICEF continued to support three transit centres which received and cared for children associated with the armed forces after they were handed over to UNICEF by ICRC. The family tracing and reunification process was particularly challenging for children formerly associated with LRA, since it often involved cross-border family tracing and reunification. In 2009 and 2010, all children formerly associated with LRA who were hosted in UNICEF-supported transit centres were reunited with their families by ICRC: 2 girls were reunited in the Central African Republic, 19 children (including 13 girls) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 4 children (including 3 girls, with a baby born at the transit centre) in the Sudan, and 1 Ugandan girl in Uganda, with a baby born in captivity.

58. At the end of the reporting period, there were several gaps in the care, family tracing and reunion with their families (with or without repatriation) of children formerly associated with armed groups, in particular children associated with LRA. Psychosocial support was weak, whether at the initial registration location or at transit centres, owing mainly to the limited availability of trained carers. In addition, facilities were basic, with no "child-friendly spaces". Furthermore, most children formerly associated with LRA could not communicate with their French-speaking caretakers. These children were often stigmatized by their caretakers and other children, possibly adding another layer of trauma.

VII. Recommendations

59. I am heartened by the commitment of the Government of the Central African Republic to protecting children, manifested by the signature, in June 2010, of the N'Djamena Declaration to end the recruitment and use of children by armed forces and groups, as well as by the signature, in September 2010, of the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, on the involvement of children in armed conflict, and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. I encourage the Government to ratify the Optional Protocols and undertake the necessary reforms to translate their provisions into national law, including through the criminalization of underage recruitment. Furthermore, I urge the Government to undertake the necessary reforms of national law to bring domestic legislation in line with commitments made under the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

60. I also commend the efforts of the Government to address the threat of LRA, in collaboration with States in the region, under the auspices of the African Union. I would urge the Government and its partners to follow up on the steps agreed upon during the African Union ministerial meeting on LRA, held in Bangui on 13 and 14 October 2010, including the establishment of a joint operations centre, the conduct of joint patrols on the borders of LRA-affected countries and the deployment of troops to facilitate access to, and protect, vulnerable communities.

61. The Government's ongoing efforts to build a protective environment and develop accountability for violence against children, such as the promulgation of the revised Penal Code and the process of revising the existing law on the protection of women against violence to include the protection of children and address sexual violence, are encouraging. I also urge the Government to ensure that grave violations against children, especially child recruitment, sexual violence and abductions, are addressed through the rigorous investigation and prosecution of those responsible for such crimes.

62. The collaboration between the Government and MICOPAX to support the Forces armées centrafricaines in their effort to protect civilians and regain control over conflict-affected areas is an important step towards protecting children. I underline the concomitant need for the international community to support the Government in its efforts to professionalize and strengthen the capacity of its defence and security forces, including its oversight mechanisms. With regard to the Government's activities in the areas of security sector reform, human rights and protection, I encourage further collaboration between MICOPAX, BINUCA and relevant child protection actors on training and capacity-building of Central African law enforcement and armed forces personnel, in the context of a holistic, nationally driven approach to security sector reform.

63. However, I remain concerned about the slow progress in the implementation of the recommendations contained in the conclusions of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict on children and armed conflict in the Central African Republic (S/AC.51/2009/2), including those pertaining to the development of concrete and time-bound action plans to halt the recruitment and use of child soldiers by the parties concerned, in accordance with Security Council resolutions 1539 (2004) and 1612 (2005). In this connection, I urge the Government of the Central African Republic to facilitate, as appropriate, the preparation of such action plans.

64. While I am encouraged by the separation of children from the ranks of APRD since June 2008, I call on APRD to ensure the comprehensive and definitive release of all remaining children. In this connection, APRD must prepare, without delay, an action plan that sets out a United Nations-verified process by which all remaining children will be permanently separated from its ranks. Only after the full implementation of an action plan can APRD be removed from the list of parties which recruit or use children, submitted annually to the Security Council. Similarly, I call on UFDR, FDPC and MLCJ to enter into dialogue with the United Nations to prepare and implement a time-bound action plan to halt the recruitment and use of children in its ranks.

65. I am deeply concerned at the lack of humanitarian access to areas under CPJP control in the north-east of the country, as well as persistent reports of grave violations against children in those areas. I encourage CPJP to engage in a dialogue with the Government towards the signature of the Libreville Comprehensive Peace Agreement. I also call on CPJP to release, immediately and without preconditions, the children reported to be in its ranks, through the establishment of a concrete, time-bound action plan, and urge CPJP to allow humanitarian actors to deliver assistance to the displaced and other populations in need in the areas under its de facto control.

66. I remain gravely concerned at reports of the use of children by local self-defence militias, which are supported by local authorities. I call on the Government to ensure the immediate and unconditional release of all children associated with these groups. As an immediate priority, I urge the Government to issue clear orders, including at the local level, prohibiting the recruitment and use of children by local self-defence militias.

67. Security, logistical and capacity challenges have affected the full establishment and implementation of the monitoring and reporting mechanism in the Central African Republic during the reporting period. In order to adequately address the child protection concerns in the country, regular meetings of the Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting should be held to ensure the full commitment of the United Nations system to monitor and report on grave violations against children, and identify appropriate follow-up actions. In order to inform the deliberations of the Task Force, robust information networks should be strengthened without delay. To that end, I encourage BINUCA, as well as relevant United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, to dedicate sufficient resources and capacity to the monitoring and reporting mechanism. Donors are encouraged to support the functioning of the mechanism, including through the funding of child protection capacity and training for partners.

68. In order to ensure the durable separation of children from armed groups in the Central African Republic, I call on United Nations agencies, funds and programmes to support the Government in the development and implementation of long-term reintegration programmes for children formerly associated with armed forces and groups, in line with the Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups.

69. I welcome the funds that have been specifically allocated for child reintegration through the Peacebuilding Fund, and call on the donor community to provide sustained resources to support child protection programmes. In this connection, I encourage donor support for the reintegration of children who will be released from armed groups listed in the annex to my annual report on children and armed conflict. In addition, psychosocial support and assistance to victims of gender-based violence, in particular to victims of LRA, is required.

70. The engagement of the Peacebuilding Commission with the Central African Republic, in particular its support for the reintegration of children formerly associated with armed groups, is noted with appreciation. I would encourage the Peacebuilding Commission to continue its commitment to children in the Central African Republic, including with regard to the socio-economic reintegration of former child combatants and the building of national capacity to protect children.

71. Finally, I would like to express my appreciation for the service of my Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict and her staff, as well as the staff of BINUCA and United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, for their efforts in monitoring and reporting on the situation of children and armed conflict in the Central African Republic.